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ABSTRACT

This paper explores three programs that are innovatively helping U.S. immigrant students become educated, productive, full-fledged citizens. New York's International High School at LaGuardia Community College, which serves immigrant students only, has extremely high attendance and graduation rates. A top priority is increasing personalization for these students. The same adults stay with the same students for 2 years. Classrooms are designed to bring students together. Intense English language instruction is provided. Houston's Lee High School serves predominantly immigrants. Its campus is completely restructured into 10 mostly self-contained communities so teachers can get to know students well. The Houston Independent School District is using the First Things First framework in three high schools, which breaks large schools down into smaller learning environments to support individual students. A family advocate meets individually with students and parents to discuss personal and school issues. North Carolina's Sanderson High School emphasizes English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction to help immigrants catch up and graduate with their peers. In other areas of North Carolina, backlash against immigrants has been significant. All three schools described in this paper have created small school settings, strengthened ESL instruction, fostered one-on-one contact between students and adults, and encouraged input from students' teachers. (Contains 10 endnotes.) (SM)

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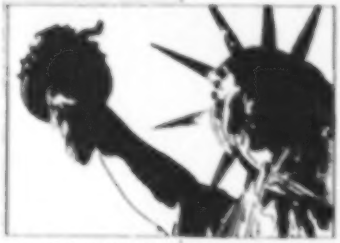

STRENGTHENING U.S. DEMOCRACY

Immigrant Students, Urban High Schools: The Challenge Continues

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Immigrant Students, Urban High Schools: The Challenge Continues

by Lucy Hood

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We want our immigrants to be Americans [but] the method of shifting the burden to the foreign born has failed. We can no longer rest content with opening schools and then counting the number who avail themselves of our generosity. The quantitative standard, the interest in, "How many are you teaching?" must give place to the qualitative standard, to the interest in, "What and how are you teaching?"

That demand for improvement in the quality of education provided to immigrants newly arrived in America appears in *Schooling of the Immigrant* (Harper & Brothers), written by Frank V. Thompson, superintendent of the Boston, Massachusetts Public Schools and published in 1920. The book was part of a series about "Americanization" funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York when this foundation was not yet a decade old and World War I had been over for less than two years.

Concerns about educating immigrants in American schools go back even further than that, according to the *Forward*, one of America's oldest immigrant-driven newspapers still publishing today. A 2001 *Forward* article reports that, "New York set up a bilingual public school in 1837 to prepare German-speaking students for regular classes." In the years that followed, local school systems around the country—some, as in the case of the New Mexico territory, not yet even official states of the union—undertook similar efforts to help immigrant youngsters cope with what for many of them was their first experience of being thrown into mainstream American life: entering public school.

And yet, in many ways, as a recent RAND Corporation study notes, "The United States is closing the 20th century the way it began," with a large influx of immigrants who are not only reshaping the country's ethnic composition but once again challenging the nation's schools to find new and innovative ways to help them become educated citizens, productive workers and full-fledged participants in our American society. (And yet again, as with the wave of European immigration at the beginning of the last century, challenging those in the American public who are concerned about the influence on American life and culture of large numbers of non-English-speaking newcomers.) This paper will explore some of the innovative programs that are meeting that challenge and highlight issues yet to be addressed as we go forward into a new century that seems to demand a new educational framework that will serve today's students and tomorrow's as well.

The Facts: More Diversity, More Change

A century ago, the majority of immigrants coming to the United States were European—Irish, Italian, Polish—and they made up about 13 percent of the total U.S. population. Today, their numbers are much larger but they comprise a smaller portion—11.5 percent—of the population. Most come from Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, and to a lesser extent, Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe. Often, they are fleeing from poverty or civil strife.

Immigrants are a very diverse group of people, says Constancia Warren, Senior Program Officer

and Director of Carnegie Corporation of New York's Urban High School Initiatives, which focuses on urban education reform and redesign of the kinds of large, impersonal big-city high schools that many immigrant students end up attending. These schools are ill-equipped to prepare immigrant high schoolers—or other types of students, for that matter—for either postsecondary education or for entry into today's knowledge-based workforce. Some recent immigrants, Warren explains, come from places with a stable economy and educational system, and their children are more likely to be at grade level, but many others are from places like Bosnia, Sierra Leone or Central America, where education has, for many, been interrupted by civil strife or economic hardship. "They run the gamut," Warren says of school-age immigrants, "and it's a huge challenge for school systems to figure out how to deal with all those different kinds of needs."

When the first, post-colonial wave of immigrants arrived in America, they encountered a population that was predominantly male, under the age of 23, living in rural areas in a household with five or more other people. Today, women outnumber men; most of the population is at least 35 and lives in urban areas in a household with one or two other people. Then, one-in-eight U.S. residents was of a race other than white. Today, it's one-in-four, and in a two-decade span between 1980 and 2000, the Hispanic population alone more than doubled.[1]

Census Bureau numbers show that in 2002, there were 32.5 million immigrants living in the United States. Of those, 52.2 percent were born in Latin America, 25.5 percent in Asia, 14 percent in Europe and the remaining 8.3 percent in other parts of the world. Asians, Europeans and people from "other regions" had the highest average levels of educational attainment, leading the way with the most high school diplomas and bachelor's degrees. The percentage of foreign-born Asians with a high school diploma was 86.8 percent, compared to 49.1 percent for Latin America. For America's high schools, these numbers are crucial. Immigrant students, particularly Hispanics, are an ever-increasing presence in the classroom, and their parents' level of educational achievement is a strong indicator of how well they will do in school.

In the 2000-2001 school year, there were an estimated 4.6 million students, or 9.6 percent of the total, who were classified as Limited English Proficient. That represents a 105 percent increase since the 1990-1991 school year, a rate far exceeding the 12 percent growth in the general population during the same 10-year period. The vast majority, or 79 percent, of non-English speakers were native Spanish speakers, followed by Vietnamese at 2 percent, Hmong at 1.6 percent, Cantonese at 1 percent and Korean at 1 percent.[2]

These trends have led experts to conclude that the level of education achieved by immigrant—particularly Hispanic—students will play a major role in determining the quality of the country's future labor force. A breakdown of Census figures by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University reinforces the point. It found that immigrants accounted for half of new wage earners in the 1990s, up from around 25 percent in the 1980s and 10 percent in the 1970s.

"These kids are today's Americans, and tomorrow's," says Warren. "They are our future leaders, too." And as such, it's become increasingly important for them, and society as a whole, to have not only a high school diploma, but also a college degree. "The real earnings of high school graduates are, in fact, declining," Warren explains, pointing out that similar levels of academic achievement are also required "to get secure jobs, jobs that have benefits and opportunity for advancement." But achievement in higher education, Warren notes, is not only about the personal quality of life for immigrants: it's about bolstering the American economy. An educated workforce has far more potential for contributing to the growth and productivity of the nation in the coming years.

Census figures also show that while newcomers to the United States continued to go to California, Texas, Florida, New York and Illinois in the 1990s, they also branched out, and in unprecedented numbers went to places such as Georgia, Montana, Mississippi, Indiana, Wisconsin, North Carolina, South Carolina and Kentucky. In fact, growth in the Hispanic population in several cities, including Atlanta, Greensboro, Charlotte, Orlando, Las Vegas and Nashville, exceeded 500 percent between 1980 and 2000, and in Raleigh it was 1,180 percent.[3]

Immigration is transforming the United States, according to a report by the Urban Institute. That is particularly true of the nation's public schools, it said, and "no set of American institutions is arguably more critical to the future success of immigrant integration." But the schools of today, particularly the traditional American high school, were not designed to educate all students to high levels. They were designed to provide a basic education to large numbers of students at a time when a high school diploma was helpful, but not necessary to succeed in the nation's economy.

Today, graduating from high school is a minimal requirement for finding a decent job in a highly skilled labor market. Yet high schools, critics say, are generally stuck in time, failing to keep up with the needs of a changing student body and a knowledge-based economy. Major weaknesses include a critical shortage of teachers trained to teach English language learners; large high school settings, which cannot provide individualized attention and often allow students to fall through the cracks; and a lack of additional time to respond to students' needs, whether that takes the form of after-school programs or the 90-minute classes typical of block scheduling. Many educators and activists also point to the recent move toward standardized testing and accountability as posing what can be an insurmountable hurdle for many immigrants, especially in states where graduation is contingent on passing a standardized test. As immigration advocate Margie McHugh says, "The system is taking a long time to adapt to who's here."

Addressing systemic change across school systems is one of the goals of Carnegie Corporation's *Schools for a New Society* initiative, a $60 million program in seven cities, matched locally and aimed at reforming the nation's high schools. "Every student in America is entitled to attend a good high school in order to be prepared for the world of the 21st century," said Vartan Gregorian, president of Carnegie Corporation of New

York, in announcing the program. "They are owed a high performance education where much is offered and much is expected."

New York: An International High School Takes Shape

Margie McHugh is director of the New York Immigration Coalition, an umbrella organization of more than 150 member groups dedicated to making sure the needs of immigrant students are met in New York City, where a little over 50 percent of the population is foreign-born or second generation.

In an effort to improve education for immigrant students, McHugh's organization and other affiliated groups relentlessly lobby for changes that include incentives for bilingual education and English-as-a-Second-Language teachers; after-school and weekend programs; greater use of translated materials and interpreters to foster parental involvement; dropout prevention programs; and an end to directing immigrant students toward GED classes to keep them from becoming a dropout statistic. The coalition says 150,000 students have been pushed out of New York City schools in the past three years.

But progress is slow, McHugh says, and the obstacles are many and varied. Three years ago, when Mayor Rudolph Giuliani formed a task force to look at bilingual education in New York City schools, there was an effort to curtail bilingual education programs and direct students toward English-only classes at a much quicker pace. In the end, neither the task force nor the Board of Education opted for that route. Instead, they ended the automatic assignment of students with limited English skills to bilingual education classes. And they gave parents the option of choosing between one of four programs for their children—bilingual education, English as a Second Language, dual language or an accelerated English program. (Recently, the city's current mayor, Michael Bloomberg, announced plans to strengthen programs that emphasize bilingual instruction.)

In other parts of the country, any debate about providing bilingual education has been effectively ended by legislation. One example is California's Proposition 227. Approved by voters in June 1998, the referendum officially ended bilingual classes in the state and called for them to be replaced by a year of intensive English instruction for non-English speakers. Since then, similar propositions have met with approval in Arizona and Massachusetts, serving as examples of the politics involved in educating immigrant students. Researchers question whether these measures are sufficient for students to achieve the "academic fluency" needed to succeed in their studies.

An interesting corollary can be found in *Now That I'm Here: What Immigrants Have to Say About Life in the U.S. Today,* published in 2003 by Public Agenda. The report states that "Nearly 9 in 10 (87 %) [of immigrants] say it is extremely important for immigrants to be able to speak and understand English. Moreover, immigrants believe it's not unreasonable for American society to expect it of them: about 2 in 3 (65%) say, 'the U.S. should expect all immigrants who don't speak English to learn it.'"

Many researchers and educators say school sys-

tems as a whole have been slow to take on the responsibility of educating immigrant youth. "On the aggregate, the data suggest we are not doing a particularly good job," says Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, professor of human development and psychology at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. "Large numbers of immigrant kids are not going to leave high schools either with the credentials or the skills that will be demanded of them by the economy. But there are pockets," he says, where "some schools are doing very innovative and interesting work."

One of those hopeful places is the International High School at LaGuardia Community College, an educational haven for immigrant students founded in 1985 and run by Principal Burt Rosenberg. The school is situated in Long Island City, a changing neighborhood in New York City's borough of Queens. Just 30 years ago, about 80 percent of Queens residents were born in the U.S. and only 3.5 percent were not citizens. Today, only 54 percent of those who live in the borough were born in the U.S. and those from Asia and various Central and South American countries make up about 40 percent of the population.

International High School, a bustling, busy place fueled by urban energy, is a collaborative effort between the New York City school system and LaGuardia Community College. It's located on the community college campus, where it benefits from such communal perks as access to the college's library and student store. Plus, Rosenberg says, the community college students provide an everyday example of what the high school students are striving for—not only a high school diploma, but a college education. Ninety percent of the students continue on to some form of postsecondary education. The graduation rate is also 90 percent, as is the attendance rate. All three 90s are amazing achievements given the students' background: not one of them was born in the United States. Instead, they more than likely took their first steps and spoke their first words in Central America, South America, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, North Africa or Asia. There are 450 students who represent 40 countries and speak 36 languages.

As newcomers to the United States, they often acquire new responsibilities beyond the classroom. They may be called upon to work in order to help support their families, to translate for their parents or to care for younger siblings while their parents work. So a top priority is to increase personalization for these students, to help fill in the gaps. To that end, "We are nosy," Rosenberg says. "We get into people's business. That's the kind of attention we provide."

The International High School is also organized into clusters. Each one has 75 kids, four teachers, a teacher/counselor and a full-time paraprofessional. The same group of adults stays with the same group of students for two years, and teachers design their classrooms in a way that brings students together. There are very few traditional school desks at the International High School. Instead, students tend to sit in small groups around a table, and they work together on assignments, often learning much about each other's language and culture in the process. Classes alternate between brief periods of teacher instruction and longer periods of group work and stu-

dent presentation, all carried out in English.

The school also provides intense doses of English-language instruction. It's part of what every classroom—math, science or social studies—does. It's the overriding focus for each of the 33 teachers at International High School. "We are a school that teaches kids English, so everybody teaches English," Rosenberg says.

One particularly remarkable example of the "everybody teaches English" idea is that as a visitor wanders the halls of the school, the language he or she is likely to hear spoken is English, despite the fact that it is not the native tongue of a single student. What English does become, though, in a school where so many different languages are spoken, is the common denominator—a way for kids from different parts of the world to connect, to trade gossip, homework assignments and even to ask for dates. Still, there is an emphasis throughout the school on helping students to stay connected to the language and culture of their home country.

The International High School has received high marks for its work, which has led New York City to begin adapting the model—which includes the idea of bringing together small groups of English-language-learners who speak different languages in order to increase their English-language interaction—in two additional districts. Unlike most schools, which are "are hampered by the ambiguity of their goals," a report by the Institute on Education and the Economy (IEE) says that International High School has benefited from a strong sense of direction that relies, in large part, on creating small learning groups. To achieve that, IEE notes, it has departed dramatically from the traditional high school format in the United States.

In Houston, From Minority to Mainstream

Two seemingly unrelated forces in the mid-1980s contributed to the current mix of students at Houston's Lee High School. The oil boom went bust and three countries in Central America were embroiled in civil wars. When oil prices collapsed, residents of the high-priced apartments and condominiums that had sprung up in the Lee area moved away, and immigrants, many of them fleeing from civil strife in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, moved in.

Affluent students gradually left the school and were replaced largely by impoverished immigrants. A reflection of the changing demographic is the number of students on the federal free and reduced-cost lunch program in the early 1990s compared to a decade later. In the 1993-1994 school year, 26.2 percent of the students were economically disadvantaged, compared with 90 percent today. Also in 1993-1994, 22.5 percent of the students were Anglo, 58.1 Hispanic, and 13.3 African American. Today, 7.1 percent are Anglo, 75.2 percent are Hispanic, and 11.8 percent are African American.[4]

Most of the 2,077 students come from 70 countries, many of them places of political turmoil, and they speak 42 languages. Beginning in the 1980s, the immigrant wave came mostly from Central America, followed by Southeast Asia, then Eastern Europe and more recently, Africa. Four years ago, the Houston Independent School District put Steve Amstutz, who was known for

working with immigrant elementary students, in charge of the school. He completely restructured the campus, breaking it into 10 mostly self-contained communities, each with anywhere from 173 to 224 students. One of the advantages of the community set-up is that teachers really get to know their students. They see the same kids all day, every day and can call them by name. There's a closeness and a sense of belonging that wasn't there before, says Garrett Reed, an English-as-a-Second-Language teacher at Lee. "I know all 200 kids I teach," he explains.

The overhaul of Lee coincided with the opening of a new high school, which alleviated an overcrowding problem on the 40-year-old campus and left the school with a clear-cut focus on minority and immigrant students. "We stopped seeing them [immigrants] as a subgroup," Amstutz says. "They are the mainstream of our school."

Perhaps the most telling detail about how the school now caters to its immigrant student population is homecoming. Instead of football, it features a soccer game, and instead of the typical high school marching band, a mariachi band performs. The school has also banished the mascot, but that took place before Amstutz arrived. It was, ironically, a general modeled after Robert E. Lee, or, as Amstutz says, "a Yosemite Sam look-alike wearing a confederate uniform." Clearly, the shift taking place at Lee is a cultural sea change that hinges on more than just differences in students' native languages.

Structuring for Success

The blueprint for Lee's new structure comes from the Institute of Research and Reform in Education (IRRE), which developed First Things First, a school reform model for breaking large schools down into smaller learning environments that are more supportive of individual students. The Houston Independent School District is using the First Things First framework in three high schools as part of a district-wide high school transformation effort under Carnegie Corporation's *Schools for a New Society* initiative, which was launched in 2000 and based on school district-community partnerships that includes parental involvement in reform as a critical element. The small school model, Amstutz says, is ideal for his student population. "It's good for all kids," he said, "but for immigrant kids, it provides for continuity and it makes sure they're not anonymous. It provides them with support systems for navigating this thing called high school."

One type of assistance available at Lee is the Family Advocate Program. Advocates are adults—teachers, coaches, and administrative staff—assigned to assist a group of 12 to 18 students. Advocates meet one-on-one with each student at last twice every nine weeks to talk about schoolwork and/or personal issues. As an advocate, Debbie Lee, a culinary arts teacher in the Health and Human Services Community—one of the 10 units in the school—says she does "stuff you would do for you own child or a neighborhood kid."

Advocates also meet with each student's parents at least once a semester. Last year, more than 90 percent of parents had at least one meeting with an advocate where parents received a progress report, letting them know where their children stood in school, how well they were doing in their classes and what requirements they needed to fulfill in order to graduate. The advocates also make sure

both students and parents know about the school's college center, geared to steer immigrant students toward a college degree.

Outreach to parents has taken the place of the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), which the school has done away with because, as Amstutz explains, it's a model that doesn't really apply to Lee students and their families. "What do we want from our parents?" he asks. "It's not popcorn sales and fundraisers. We want to make sure parents know where their children stand." And it's the advocates' responsibility to try to make parents feel welcome at the school, notes teacher Debbie Lee.

Motivation is the Key

With all obstacles stacked against them, there is one great advantage shared by many immigrant students: academics, experts and educators agree that they are highly motivated. Inevitably, in pursuit of a better life, first generation immigrants generally work hard to excel in school. In their book *Children of Immigration,* Marcelo Suárez-Orozco and his wife, Carola Suárez-Orozco, Harvard senior research associate and lecturer on education, say the immigrant's positive attitude is "a remarkable resource that must be cultivated."

The first generation, Amstutz notes, is here "because they've chosen to be here. They either fled from where they lived, or they are seeking a better opportunity in the United States." Either way, there is a strong desire to achieve, he continues, though that is often beaten down by issues of poverty, race and perhaps the single biggest hurdle they face when they set foot on a high school campus—language. Nearly 40 percent of all Lee students are in either bilingual or English-as-a-Second-Language classes, which far surpasses the district average of 25.7 percent and is more than double the state average of 13.1 percent.

One of these students is Jose Alberto Rocas, 19, who's in the ninth grade. He came to the United States two years ago after a 29-day trek from his home in the Mexican state of Guerrero. "I came here to improve my life," he says. When he arrived, Rocas did not go to school, finding work instead as a mechanic. But he realized that "life is difficult if you don't speak English," so he enrolled at Lee, and now he wants "to learn English, finish school and later go to college to study engineering."

Everything Lee is doing—the small-community structure, a focus on English language instruction, parental outreach and the advocate program—is aimed at reaching these kids, and the results so far are positive, including student improvement on the Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT). At a glance, the numbers don't look impressive; a mere fraction of a point, but Amstutz is thrilled. More students than ever are taking the tests, which initially caused the scores to go down. Now they're starting to go back up and have reached roughly the same mark previously achieved by a much smaller and more select group of students.

It's symbolic of the overriding, can-do expectations Amstutz has for his students. He wants them to take the PSAT, the SAT and go to college. Or, as he says, "Every single student is going to college until they prove me wrong." To that end there is David Johnson and the College Center he runs at the school. It's his full-time job to help Lee students get an education beyond high

school. He provides students with information and assistance in regard to admissions, applications, deadlines, scholarships, loans, grants and whatever else they might need to nudge them toward a college or university campus.

Johnson likes to talk about three gifted students from Mexico who had the misfortune of going through Lee High School prior to 2001. Before then, undocumented immigrants had to pay out-of-state tuition to go to college in Texas, which effectively prohibited most, if not all, from seeking a bachelor's degree. According to Johnson, they dropped out of high school because they knew they'd never be able to go on to college. All that changed when lawmakers passed House Bill 1403, which since 2001 has allowed undocumented immigrants to pay in-state college tuition and to apply for state-funded grants. Passage of the bill was a huge victory for immigrant students in Texas, but only a few other states—California, New York and Utah—have similar legislation in place.

Testing and Accountability: The Pluses and the Minuses

One major hurdle that faces students at Lee is the state's accountability system. They lag far behind students elsewhere in Texas in their performance on the state's standardized test. The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, or TAAS, was used to measure student achievement in the Lone Star State from 1993 to 2002; beginning in 2003, however, students started taking a more rigorous test called the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, or TAKS, which will become part of the accountability system in 2004. But TAAS results show Lee's overall passing rate was 54.1 percent in 2002, compared with a district average of 79.9 percent and a state average of 85.7 percent.[5]

These passing rates are a key component of the accountability system in Texas. Along with dropout rates, the state uses the test results to determine whether individual schools and school districts are low performing, acceptable, recognized or exemplary. Lee is an acceptable school, but just barely escapes a low-performing rating.

Texas also breaks the data down according to subgroups—economically disadvantaged, African American, Hispanic and White. And the accountability system requires that each group achieve certain passing rates in order for the school as a whole to achieve a particular ranking. All subgroups, for example, must achieve a 90 percent passing rate for a campus to be exemplary.

The system has been in place in Texas for 10 years, and it is now the model for the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which is slightly different in detail, but similar in concept. Instead of a passing rate, it requires a certain margin of improvement for each subgroup from one year to the next.

At the high school level, however, the testing system has as many drawbacks as potential benefits for immigrant students. On the one hand, it breaks down information in a way that forces all high schools to focus on their minority student populations and it allows immigrant students to wait a year after entering school before they take the test. Still, students are required to pass the test in order to graduate, a formidable barrier for high schoolers who may have just arrived in the U.S., speak little or no English and may also lack a background of

formal education in their own country.

One such student is Jerson Montiero, an 18-year-old senior who moved to the United States from Angola when he was 14. He is reticent about telling his story, but it involves a narrow escape from the bloodshed that plagued his country for nearly three decades. "The fact that he is here—even that he's alive—is amazing," Amstutz says.

A star soccer player with great promise for an athletic scholarship, Montiero did not know until the 11th hour whether he would graduate with his class. He had failed the math and writing sections of the TAAS four times; school administrators were worried he wouldn't clear the hurdle; and Amstutz opted to look at the silver lining in case he failed: "The teams will be waiting for him," he said. "They want those feet." Fortunately, Montiero pulled through and he passed the two remaining portions of the test at the end of his senior year.

Montiero was able to beat the clock, albeit barely. Bur for many others, there are greater odds. One of those is Ayaovi Edoh, also 18, from Togo, West Africa. She's in the ninth grade. She came to the United States in May 2000 at the age of 15 with her father, her stepmother and five siblings. She is determined to finish high school and get a job so she can make enough money to bring her mother to the United States. But Edoh is struggling academically. Unlike her brother, she did not go to school in Togo, and now her father discourages her from going to school. "They want me to get a job and help pay the bills," she says sadly.

Under the state's accountability system Montiero would have been a failure if he had not passed the TAAS, and even though Edoh has not yet taken it, she is walking a fine line. If she drops out, that will also count against the school's accountability ranking, and in doing so, it counts against Amstutz and his teachers. "Why am I a failure," he asks, "if I don't educate this kid in two years?" Amstutz explains that he simply wants more time, until the students are 21, and he wants the state to reserve judgment until they finish school. "Give me the space and time to do it, and hold me accountable at the end," he says.

In North Carolina, a New Phenomenon

Sanderson High School Principal Cathy Moore came to the United States from her native Ecuador when she was a child. She remembers starting school in the United States. And she remembers how teachers mislabeled her because she was quiet, withdrawn and spoke little English. Now she runs one of 16 high schools in the Raleigh area, and her ability to speak Spanish has proven to be an invaluable asset in a school where the student population has become increasingly Hispanic.

Large numbers of immigrants began to arrive in Raleigh and its environs—and in many other urban areas in the South—beginning in the 1990s, when a thriving economy attracted large numbers of laborers. Since then, the Latino population in Raleigh, Charlotte and Greensboro has grown by 631 percent, 685 percent and 809 percent respectively,[6] and the number of Limited English Proficient students in North Carolina has surpassed 60,000, more than four times what it was a decade ago.

One of the most dramatic examples of this phenomenon is North Carolina's Research Triangle area, comprising Raleigh, Durham and Chapel

Hill. The foreign-born population—which includes people arriving from countries as diverse as Korea, Burundi, Guatemala and Viet Nam—reached 9.2 percent in 2000, three times what it was in 1990, and the number of Hispanic residents soared.[7] The result for many schools has been a burgeoning student population with limited, if any, English-language abilities and a tremendous challenge for teachers, many of whom have never been trained in English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) skills.

Sanderson High School is located in a blue-collar neighborhood of Raleigh. Housing is relatively inexpensive, and the area, which is close to downtown and convenient to bus routes, has attracted immigrants from places as far flung as Bangladesh, Venezuela, Korea, Albania, Guatemala and Mexico. The school has immigrant students from 30 countries, and roughly half are Hispanic.

Moore says that one of her biggest challenges is timing, and her school has carefully designed its ESL program to help immigrant students get up to speed and graduate with their peers. Sanderson has a four-period block schedule, and students who are Limited English Proficient spend one period in an ESL class and another in a tutoring session. For the remainder of the day, they're in a regular classroom. Sanderson also has science classes tailored for English language learners, and four of the ninth grade English classes are taught by teachers trained in ESL.

Judy Page, who runs the ESL program at Sanderson, says that educating immigrants has become one of the school's fastest growing needs. A veteran teacher and a witness to the school's changing demographics, she adds that one of her biggest concerns is the increasing number of immigrant students who have had little or no schooling before they come to the United States.

Many of the new immigrants are also poor, notes Fran Hoch, director of the state's ESL program, and many are also undocumented, posing additional drawbacks for students at the high school level, which, she said, is "the part of education that has changed the least. And it is, perhaps, the least adaptable."

Contending with a Backlash

While many have been accepting of the soaring immigrant population in North Carolina, not everyone has welcomed them with open arms. The backlash has been particularly notable in rural regions, like the Catawba County area outside of Charlotte and the Chatham County area outside of Raleigh.

In Catawba County, where the Latino population increased almost eightfold between 1990 and 2000, anti-immigrant sentiment contributed to the defeat of an $80 million school-improvement bond. Catawba County schools wanted to build a new high school, a middle school and two elementaries, but more than 6,500 residents voted down the bond proposal. Anti-bond organizers said they were opposed to a projected tax increase and to educating immigrant children.

Five months after the bond was defeated, an anti-immigrant contingent took to the streets. Backed by the North Carolina chapter of the Council of Conservative Citizens, a right-wing group based in St. Louis, a crowd of protesters gathered on

Main Street in the county seat of Hickory and shouted "Go home!" to immigrants. Protesters blamed immigrants for a high unemployment rate and crowded schools.[8]

The anti-immigrant sentiment in Hickory is not an isolated case. Across the state in Chatham County, racial tension has erupted repeatedly in recent years. In 1998, former County Commissioner Rick Givens sent a letter to the Immigration and Naturalization Service asking the agency to take the undocumented workers living there back to their home countries. And in early 2000, former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke led an anti-immigrant rally in the county seat of Siler City.

By then, however, Givens and other county leaders had acquired a new attitude about the immigrants living in their midst, and they worked to mitigate Duke's effort to foster an anti-immigrant fervor. Their efforts paid off, and the anti-immigrant rally "really was a non-event," says Millie Ravenel, director of the North Carolina Center for International Understanding (NCCIU), which is based at the University of North Carolina. "They sent David Duke packing."

Givens' change of heart took place after he visited Mexico and came back with a greater appreciation for the plight of immigrant workers. The trip was sponsored by NCCIU, which has taken several state and local leaders—including educators—to Mexico in an effort to cultivate awareness and appreciation for North Carolina's new immigrant population. "If we don't have a community and a workforce that gets along well together," Ravenel said, "we're not going to be economically viable."

NCCIU and its work comprise one of many efforts to bridge the gap between whites, blacks and immigrants of all nationalities. In Charlotte, for example, *The Charlotte Observer* has published articles debunking widespread misconceptions that immigrants thrive on public assistance and do not pay taxes, and the paper has documented many other local initiatives. They include a joint effort by police, the county's parks and recreation department and an immigrant advocacy group to create soccer and baseball leagues, and another between the city of Charlotte and local organizations to offer language classes at a church in a historically black neighborhood that is now home to a growing number of Hispanic families.[9]

The ripple effect of North Carolina's new immigrant population is enormous. It not only represents a sea change in the lives of those who have left their homelands, but has also had a profound effect on the state's economy, its social services, and the daily lives of everyone from police officers to health inspectors. As one such inspector said, "It's no longer all barbecue and fish fries."[10]

But perhaps the most crucial arena for the state and its new foreign-born population is education. Public schools are at the epicenter of change, says Jim Johnson, a demographer at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "They have to respond to the challenge," he states. "Our whole education system is going to have to be overhauled to deal with the new demographics."

Meeting the Challenge

Separated by at least 500 miles, the public schools of North Carolina and the International High School at LaGuardia Community College in New

York City, represent two ends of the immigrant student spectrum. The North Carolina schools exemplify the multi-layered challenges faced by traditional school systems trying to adapt to an influx of students from different cultures, speaking different languages and with different levels of educational achievement. The International High School—as well as Lee High School in Houston—represents an attempt to institute new and innovative policies and practices and even school restructuring to respond to the special needs of immigrant youth.

What all three examples have in common is that they have departed dramatically from the typical comprehensive high school originally designed to prepare students for a bygone era, when a college education was not a necessity and the American economy did not depend on the kind of broad, knowledge-based skills today's workers must have. An effort has been made to create small-school settings for the students; to strengthen English-as-a-Second-Language instruction; to foster one-on-one contact between adults and students; and to encourage input from those who know the students best—their teachers.

A key component of these reforms is the teacher, points out Carnegie Corporation's Catherine Pino, Deputy Director of Urban High School Initiatives, who also notes that English-as-a-Second-Language teachers and administrators are particularly aware of the needs of immigrant students and their input should be part of any effort to educate immigrant students. Likewise, there should be a collaborative effort between ESL and regular classroom teachers, but "one of the challenges," Pino notes, "is to find ways for mainstream teachers and ESL teachers to have shared professional development and to take advantage of each other's experiences with students who are learning English."

Substantive changes are needed in most high schools if immigrants are to be well served. But so far, the flow of newcomers to the United States is outpacing classroom reform. The resistance to change is multifaceted. The teacher shortage, particularly in the area of English as a Second Language, is one hurdle; politics, often coupled with anti-immigrant sentiments is another; and frequently, a lack of resources is yet one more. Particularly in a time when the U.S. economy is experiencing a downswing and workers across the board—from white collar to blue and every shade in-between—are having trouble finding employment, there is a tendency to support the notion that our country can no longer welcome immigrant groups and individuals who are perceived as "putting a strain on the system." But the situation also provides opportunity for us as a society: a chance to once again renew and reinvest in the innovation, new ideas, knowledge and dedicated workforce that the mingled streams of humanity have always brought to this nation. Adapting to diversity has been our hallmark; educating all our children has been our strength.

Author and youth activist Marian Wright Edelman has said that "Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it." The idea of education as the primary tool for improving self and society has always been at the core of American civic life; in schools across the nation, in lessons being learned by students both native born and immigrant alike, undoubtedly it resonates still.

NOTES

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2. *Survey of the States' Limited English Proficient Students and Available Educational Programs and Services*, U.S. Department of Education, 2000-2001 summary report
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